

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**FOOD SAFETY TIPS FOR THE HOLIDAYS**

Reno, Nev. - With the holiday season fast approaching, the Washoe County District Health Department reminds consumers about the importance of safe food handling to prevent foodborne illness.

According to Robbin Rose, Supervisor of the Foods Program for Environmental Health Services (EHS) at the District Health Department, "Bacterial pathogens like Salmonella and Campylobacter can be present in foods, such as meat and poultry, and can cause illness due to insufficient cooking, inadequate cooling and improper food handling practices." Properly preparing and handling foods can assure us all a safe meal every day of the year, but especially during the holidays when it is easy to forget to keep cold items cold and hot items hot."

Consumers don't have to worry about catching avian flu when preparing and eating turkey and other domestic poultry during the holidays because there is no evidence of these viruses in the United States. Poultry is not imported from affected countries and in addition, cooking poultry properly will kill any viruses and bacteria.

Rose offers the following simple, easy-to-remember food safety tips:

**Keep hands and food contact surfaces clean; wash them often:**

- Always wash your hands with warm, soapy water before and after handling raw foods, after using the toilet, after changing diapers and after handling pets. Dry hands with a clean, single-use paper towel. People with cuts or skin infections on their hands should not prepare food.

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## **HOLIDAY FOOD SAFETY**

**2-2-2-2-2**

- Thoroughly clean all work surfaces, utensils and dishes with hot soapy water and rinse with hot water before and after each use. Sanitize surfaces with bleach/water solution (one tablespoon per gallon of water) after rinsing, especially if contacted with raw meats. Knives, cutting boards and meat grinders should be washed thoroughly (in the dishwasher, for example) before using them for other foods.

### **Keep foods separate; don't cross contaminate:**

- Always wash fruits and vegetables in clean sinks and keep fruits and vegetables away from raw meats, poultry, eggs, fish and any other raw animal product.
- When tasting food, ladle a small amount of it into a small dish and taste with a clean spoon. Remove the dish and spoon from the area and clean when finished.

### **Refrigerate foods promptly:**

- Refrigerate or freeze turkey and other meats promptly after purchase. Prevent meat juices from spilling on and contaminating other foods or surfaces both at the market and at home. Refrigeration should be kept at 41 degrees or colder.
- Thaw a frozen turkey inside the refrigerator in its original wrapping. Thawing a moderate-sized turkey in this manner may take two to four days. If time does not permit a gradual thaw, place the frozen turkey in a watertight wrapper and immerse in cold -- not hot or warm -- water until the meat is pliable. Change the water every half hour.

### **Cook foods to proper temperatures:**

- Rinse the turkey thoroughly in cold water and drain well before cooking.
- Stuffing should be cooked separately. Turkey should be placed immediately in a preheated oven set no lower than 325 degrees. Turkey and other poultry should be cooked to an internal temperature of 165 degrees to kill pathogens that may be present, and the stuffing must reach 165 degrees. Always use a meat thermometer to ensure that meat is thoroughly cooked. To accurately measure the temperature, insert a thermometer in the thickest part of the turkey thigh, but not against the bone. Turkey meat is thoroughly cooked when the hip joint moves easily and the juices run clear. Steaks and roasts should be cooked to at least 145 degrees and ground meat should be cooked to at least 155 degrees.

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## **HOLIDAY FOOD SAFETY**

### **3-3-3-3-3**

- When leftovers are eaten hot, they should be heated to at least 165 degrees or until hot and steaming throughout.
- Foods cooked or reheated in microwaves should be stirred or turned occasionally to ensure that all parts of the food are thoroughly cooked. If using frozen meat, first microwave the meat until completely thawed, then follow by cooking. If microwaving is not possible, then allow at least one-and-a-half times the usual cooking time to ensure that the meat is sufficiently cooked throughout.

#### **Refrigerate leftovers:**

- Turkey should be refrigerated one of two ways: within two hours after it is cooked; or right after cooking, the turkey should be de-boned, sliced or pulled into pieces no more than 2 1/2 inches thick and refrigerated in shallow containers. Store the meat, stuffing and stock in separate shallow containers in the refrigerator or freezer.
- If properly wrapped, leftover meat may be safely consumed after being frozen for one to three months.
- Keep refrigerated all cream, custard and meringue pies and any other foods with custard filling, except when being served.

Resources for information on food safety include the federal Food and Drug Administration Food Information Hotline at (888) SAFE FOOD and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Meat and Poultry Hotline at (800) 535-4555 or [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov). Consumers can also access the national Partnership for Food Safety Education's "Fight BAC" (bacteria) Web page at <http://www.fightbac.org/>. Practicing good food safety rules will help ensure a safe and happy holiday season. For more information, please contact EHS at 328-2434, or check our Web page at [www.washoecounty.us/health](http://www.washoecounty.us/health).